

Heb. 13:20-21 The Work of the Triune God in the Gospel of Grace

Throughout this letter to the Hebrews, we have seen the great plan of God to fulfill all his promises in the Lord Jesus Christ. In this letter we have seen the plan of God to move from the old covenant to the new as it is fulfilled in Jesus. We have seen that Jesus is superior to the angels. He is superior to Moses. He is superior to Joshua. He is superior to the high priest under the covenant with Moses. And we have been exhorted to LOOK UNTO CHRIST where we will find ALL of God's blessings. We have been warned against unbelief. We have been warned against falling away, which is often displayed as those who call themselves Christians, regularly neglect the gather of God's people. What a great Letter for us!

Today, we come to the author's last words. And really, these words are a summary of everything He has said about the great plan and work of God in what he calls the "eternal" covenant (v. 20b). For us today, the working out of this eternal covenant is also called the Gospel, the good news. The Book of Hebrews is one way of presenting this Gospel. When I think of Rom. 8:28 which says "**God works all things for our good,**" He does this in and through the Gospel of Christ, which is the eternal plan of God to save his people and do good to them forever. How glorious is our God! If you are a Christian, you are here today because of God and his grace in the gospel! Listen to the full words of Rom. 8:28-30: "**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**" In the Gospel of grace we have the purpose and plan of God the Father, carried out and fulfilled in the work in God the Son, and then applied powerfully for our good by God the Holy Spirit. With this in mind, I have three parts to the sermon as we consider the grace of God in the Gospel: 1) God the Father is the **fountain** of divine grace; 2) God the Son is the **channel** through which divine grace comes to us; and 3) God the Holy Spirit is the **nature** of divine grace. (These three terms come from A.W. Pink.)

1. God the Father is the fountain of divine grace. In our verses God the Father is described as the source of divine grace. In v. 20 he "**raises Jesus from the dead**" and this is according to his "**eternal covenant.**" In v. 21 He "**equips**" us for every good work. All of this work "**pleases Him.**" And forever He receives the glory for this great work. In this way, God is a like a fountain. I think of a fountain with water coming from below, working its way to the top and then running down to fill all the parts of the fountain. I also think of the natural springs all over Tatarstan which have been there for as long as the people can remember and their output is still the same. In the same kind of way, God the Father is the fountain of divine grace. As we sing: "*Praise God from whom all blessings flow.*"

Now, when we think of divine grace, we think of blessings that come down to us from God. But, the blessings of God come to us in the context of hostility. As we look around and we see sin and death and heartache and all the evils of this world. We see a lack of peace! Yet, here God is described as the God of peace, and this peace is connected to the resurrection of Jesus. Let's think about this further from the context of Hebrews. Look over at 12:23: "**to God, the judge of all.**" Here, God is the judge of all. He is not described as a judge of a lower magistrate or a judge on the supreme court. He is called the Judge of All. And by what standard does he judge? He

judges by his own holiness, his own perfection. He is Holy and cannot do anything unjust. He is always right and just in his judgments.

Let's think back. In the Garden of Eden when he commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of good and evil, what did they do? They disobeyed! And what was God's verdict as judge? He said, "*You are guilty!*" And the just punishment for disobedience to a holy God is death. We did not come up with the verdict. God did. And his judgments are always right! Now, Adam and Eve didn't die physically . . . yet. Instead, they were separated from their source of life. They were thrown out of God's presence in the Garden of Eden, awaiting a future judgment. And in this judgment, in this separation, God (the judge) does something that took away their peace. He puts "enmity" between Himself and Adam and Eve. The Apostle Paul calls this "hostility." Rom. 8:7-8 says, "**For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**"

Adam and Eve broke God's law. And as sinners, they were guilty. Instead of peace, there is now hostility; and this hostility is mutual. The judge has been offended. Such is the case with us! We have broken God's law/s. Look at v. 12:18-21, speaking of God's law given to Moses, notice the enmity, the fear, the lack of peace when we stand before a holy God. "**For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."** This is enmity! This is hostility! And when there is enmity, when there is hostility, there is no peace.

Yet, for Christians, those who find themselves on the right side of the eternal covenant, they find peace. If you are a Christian, you have peace. Why? We find peace because we have a mediator between sinful men and a holy God, one who has fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law and laid down his life as a sacrifice. And in this sacrifice Christ bore our sins. He took them upon himself. He took them away (expiation). Is. 53:4-5 says: "**Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.**" And that's not all. In his sacrifice he has also taken away the wrath of God (propitiation). In Rom. 3:21 we read: "**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.**" And then in vv. 24-25: We are "**justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood . . .**" This is the Gospel of grace, the work of redemption flowing down from God the Father in the eternal covenant displayed in the great atonement of Christ. But there is more.

Notice also that our peace is tied to the resurrection (v. 20). In the atonement of Christ, YES, our sins are taken away. YES, the wrath of God is appeased. But, if we stop with the atonement, the cross of Christ and end there, what is missing? LIFE. In order for the atonement to fulfill the promise of God's eternal covenant, DEATH must be conquered. And our text says that God "**brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus . . .**" Think about it! As long as Christ stayed

dead, he was still a prisoner under the arrest of divine vengeance. He must be “released” from that prison. What benefit does the criminal have if he is acquitted, but is never released from prison? Brothers and sisters, there is no peace if our Lord stays in the grave! But, he did not stay in the grave. After 3 days he rose from the dead. And God sent an angel to roll away the stone. Today, our Lord is risen! And the resurrection of Jesus is God’s stamp on the eternal covenant. In Rom. 4:25 Paul says, he was “**delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.**” This means for us today, that, not only are our sins taken away, the wrath of God appeased, but also as Christ was raised from the dead, so shall we! All of this must be so if we are to have peace! And this is what God has done in the Gospel of grace!

For us, this means there is no peace outside the gospel of Christ! There is no blood that can atone, except the blood of Jesus! There is no life this world can give unless it comes through the power of a resurrected Christ who died for our sins! The Gospel secures for us so many things, but it begins with the peace of God. Do we not sing, “*Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved, How precious did that grace appear, The hour I first believed.*” Some of the last words Jesus spoke to his disciples were these: “**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid**” (John 14:27). The peace of God leads us through this world, where there is no peace. Let me mention a few applications.

Application: There is no peace for the wicked. There is no lasting peace in this world, only enmity God which flows down to our enmity with people.

Application: We must bring peace. We are light. We are salt. We are peacemakers (Matt. 5). And as much as possible we must live with peace with all people (Rom. 12:18).

Application: In another context Jesus says, “**I did not come to bring peace, but a sword**” (Matt. 10:34).

2. God the Son is the channel of divine grace. Our text says that, because of who He is and what He has done, he is now the “**great shepherd of the sheep.**” Now, in the context of Hebrews, the author spends a lot of time speaking about Moses the great leader. Moses is the “shepherd” of Israel that led them out of slavery. He is the channel through which God delivered his people. And we look back, we see Moses as a picture of the real savior, the great shepherd of his sheep. Moses was a shepherd, but only an under shepherd to prepare us for the real one to come.

What does a shepherd do? I think of Ps. 23. We read: “**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**” A shepherd provides for the needs of his sheep. “**He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.**” A shepherd looks out for the good of his sheep. He cares about them as his own name as a shepherd is at stake. “**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**” Here we see that the

shepherd protects and comforts his sheep. And the blessings of the leadership of the shepherd are abundant. In all these ways (and more) Jesus is our great shepherd.

When speaking of the great shepherd our author (as usual) draws from the OT. There are many passages that speak of a Shepherd who will come one day and feed his people. Let me give just a couple: Is. 40:10-11: “**Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.**” Ezek. 34:23: “**And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.**” Today, because of his coming in the flesh, his death, his resurrection, He is the great Shepherd of his people.

Let me ask, what makes a good shepherd? Is it leading or serving? What do you think? Well, it is both. And in fact, the Bible makes it clear that the one who leads will be the one who serves. If you will be a good shepherd, you will serve the sheep. And this is leadership. Parents, if you will lead your children, you will serve them. Fathers, if you will lead your wives, you will serve them. Friends, if you will be a good friend, you will serve your friends. Children, if you will lead your siblings, you will serve them. I think of Jesus words in Mark 10:45: “**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” **As we’ve seen, this is what Jesus has done for us!**” In this (and as we’ve seen above), in this way Jesus is the channel of divine grace!

There are 3 main passages in the NT that speak of Jesus as the great shepherd. In John 10:1, emphasizing the cross, Jesus says: “**I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**” In 1 Pet. 5:4, emphasizing his resurrection and his appearing, we read: “**And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.**” And our final passage is here in Heb. 13:20, with a particular emphasis on the “**blood**” (Great High Priest laying down his own life and ushering a new covenant, the eternal covenant). Today, Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd of his people. Because of who He is and what He has done, He is the head of the church. And one day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. Now, a couple applications.

Application: Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep, but not the goats (Matt. 25:31 ff.). This means that today, if you are a Christian, the Lord Jesus is your shepherd. And ALL the things we read in Ps. 23 He is doing and will do for you. If you are not a Christian, He is not your shepherd. All the things we read in Ps. 23 are not for you. If this is the case, you must look unto (Christ by faith and be saved.

Application: For pastors and all of us. To Peter, “**Feed my sheep.**” As leaders, we must do this. But, also as Christians, we do this by making disciples.

Implication: God as “Spirit” cannot shepherd us. To be a shepherd is to be with the sheep. This is the incarnation, Immanuel, God with us! And how does he lead us now? Turn to #3 “by the Holy Spirit.”

3. God the Holy Spirit is the nature of divine grace. Look at v. 21: “: Now may God . . . **“equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”** In other words, Because of the work of the Father as the fountain of divine grace and because of the work of the Son as the channel of divine grace as the Great Shepherd, we have been given the Spirit to apply all these things in our lives. This is really the work of sanctification in our lives. For Christians living in this world, this is one of the SURE blessings of the gospel. What God begins, He will finish. Your calling is practical holiness. What God commands, he gives the power to carry it out. As verse 21 says, He will **“equip you with everything good that you may do his will.”** He works **“in us that which is pleasing in his sight.”** And this sanctification comes to us in the Gospel of grace because of the person and work of the Son (Gospel), **“to whom will be glory forever and ever.”**

Let me remind us of this truth through some verses. In John 15, right before Jesus goes to the cross, he says to his disciples, **“I am going away. But when I go, I will send the Helper, and He will lead you into all truth.”** Eph. 2:8-10: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** “We are his workmanship.” This means God is working in us, and this, by the Spirit. Phil. 1:6: **“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”** 2 Pet. 1:3 **“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence . . .”** 1 Thess. 4:3: **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification . . .”** In the context of Hebrews, the author is saying in conclusion: “You can obey the commands of God,” **“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”** (Phil. 2:13). This is the power of the Holy Spirit as the “nature” of divine grace.

Everything we need for life and godliness! Everything! We have! The Father is the fountain. The Son is the channel. The Holy Spirit is the nature.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen!”